

Seeing the bigger picture: The refugee crisis and the link to CFSP

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The EU's current approach in dealing with the refugee crisis is not working. Closing borders is certainly not addressing the challenge. The United Nations (UN) recorded more than 218,000 arrivals to Europe in the month of October, almost as many as during the whole of 2014. There is no way of managing these flows – and the crisis itself – if we do not concentrate on the bigger picture.

Globalisation and a growing complexity of issues have led to an increasing overlap between internal and external policy issues. In the face of crises, solutions therefore also have to consider the growing externalisation of migration and interdependence of states. Conflicts that generate migratory flows have broad consequences. As we can see right now, they put pressure on the Schengen system and create the perfect breeding ground for populist rhetoric leading to an erosion of values and principles, possibly jeopardising the European project itself.

This has two implications: (1) states cannot cope with the challenge of irregular migration on their own, and (2) irregular migration has to be addressed through internal and external policies. Thus, in order to solve this problem the European Union (EU) and its members need to develop more effective mechanisms that link migration and foreign policy. As for the EU's foreign policy response, instead of insisting on fragmented state-level policies, a common approach is required.

What are we doing wrong?

In the face of this crisis, we keep talking about “tackling root causes” and the need for a “comprehensive approach”, but identifying viable solutions is highly difficult, given the magnitude of the challenge. Syria and Afghanistan currently generate the greatest migratory flows (around 4.3 million and 2.6 million refugees respectively), but the Sahel and the Horn of Africa are also crucial regions, with Somalia (more than 1 million) and Sudan (more than 600,000) closely following the former. The continued chaos and political instability in Libya facilitates the transit of irregular migrants.

In many cases, addressing root causes means dealing with a plurality of (often non-state) actors entangled in extremely complex conflicts which involve hard security issues rather than soft diplomacy, but the EU as an actor is neither capable nor willing to use military interventions in these cases. Furthermore, the comprehensive approach is a set of tools rather than a framework to be applied to any case, which means that such an approach would need coordination and strategy. At the moment, however, the EU's approach relies on the smallest common denominator regarding member states' geopolitical interests and short-term thinking. So how can the EU's actions match its rhetoric?

Foreign policy remains a state-centric domain, and member states lack the will to establish a truly COMMON Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). With the current CFSP, however, the EU does not have the capacity to stabilise its neighbourhood and the regions beyond. Not much will change about that in the near future. Instead, what the EU and its member states can realistically do is make a greater effort to work together and use CFSP as a vehicle, making use of all the tools and instruments at their disposal.

What should the EU's foreign policy response focus on?

Firstly, the EU has to foster relations with third countries. Ways to share the responsibility have to be explored, especially with those currently shouldering the heaviest burden, such as Lebanon, Turkey, or Jordan. Meanwhile, the EU should also start talks with other developed countries that could help sharing the burden, like the U.S. for example. Initiatives, such as conferences with countries of origin or transit or the EU-Turkey Action Plan, represent steps in the right direction, but the EU needs to think more strategically about their political implications: What do these countries want and what are we willing to offer? Considering the AKP's

majority in parliament and the political urgency in the EU, Turkey finds itself in a comfortable position to extract more concessions in exchange for greater cooperation on readmissions and border control. Along the same lines, the Valletta Summit demonstrated the improved bargaining position of African states, striking down the idea of EU *laissez-passer* documents for return purposes and emphasising a greater focus on development cooperation, legal migration, mobility and remittances. The EU's plans for more constructive regional cooperation therefore need to move further beyond readmissions and returns and member states need to match their words with concrete deeds.

Secondly, development aid and humanitarian assistance to host countries and countries of origin and transit have to be increased. The European Commission has proposed a new development-oriented approach towards forced displacement from the outset of a crisis, for which pilot projects exist in North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa are supposed to help raise more funds, but the created development funds are still short of more than €2 billion in national contributions, according to the European Commission. Similarly, increased humanitarian aid is desperately needed for the people in Syria and refugees in host countries, as well as within Europe.

Thirdly, the EU needs to make better use of its crisis management and conflict prevention tools under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The mandate for EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia has shown how home affairs and foreign policy can sensibly be linked. In a conflict like the Syrian one, the EU is currently highly unlikely to send troops, but the wide range of military operations and civilian missions can be used effectively in other circumstances, including the EUCAP SAHEL Niger and Mali's contributions to managing irregular migration. All of this is linked to a crucial need for more efficient early warning systems in order to plan preventive responses early on and not *ex post*.

Lastly, a multilateral effort is needed. A crisis of such complex migratory flows across continents plays out on a global scale, demanding the involvement of all relevant actors. This provides a chance to pool not only expertise but also capabilities. Close cooperation with other international and regional organisations, such as the UN, NATO, the IOM, the African Union or the Arab League, represents an aspect to which the EU can add value, given its own regional nature. Considering its recent successes in mediation (Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, Agreement to overcome the political crisis in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, E3+3 Iran nuclear deal), the EU has proven that it can play a decisive part in bringing stakeholders to the table.

What future for CFSP?

The refugee crisis represents a very demanding and all-encompassing foreign policy challenge, which the EU has to address with unity, vision and courage. However, the EU's response to the crisis is not about taking on tasks it is simply not capable of coping with. The EU is not expected to be the driving force in solving every crisis, given its modest clout on hard security issues.

This crisis is a common problem that needs a common solution, which can only be sustainable in the form of a common approach that combines internal and external policies. It could become a testing case for CFSP in the long run, if member states recognise the need for a truly common policy, which can be translated in the upcoming EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, to be presented by June 2016. However, if this crisis does not lead to a change in member states' attitudes, then the future of the EU looks rather bleak.

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